

**State Planning Office
WEEKLY HIGHLIGHTS
Week ending February 15, 2008**

State law assigns four core duties to the State Planning Office that include: 1) conducting continuing economic analysis, including economic forecasting, 2) coordinating the development of the State's economy and energy resources with the conservation of its natural resources; 3) providing technical assistance to towns and regions; and 4) providing technical assistance to the Governor and Legislature by undertaking special studies and plans and preparing policy alternatives.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

February 21

Quality of Place Asset-based Development Working Group
1:00 PM - 3:00 PM Cross Office Building, Room 300, Augusta
CONTACT: Jody Harris at 287-5424 or jody.harris@maine.gov

ECONOMICS & DEMOGRAPHICS

LD 1 report shows that tax burden reduction requires vigilance. The State Planning Office released its annual progress report on LD 1. The report shows that for the third year in a row the growth rate of property taxes was lower than before LD 1 went into effect. However, the reduction in the growth of property taxes was less dramatic than before. While the State and a majority of municipal and county governments stayed within their LD 1 limits, 82% of school administrative units exceeded their spending benchmarks. The trend of school units exceeding their LD 1 spending caps is accelerating. For more information about the LD 1 report, please visit: <http://www.state.me.us/spo/economics/ld1/index.htm>. **CONTACT:** Kate Reilly at 287-1479 or Catherine.reilly@maine.gov

MAINE COASTAL PROGRAM

Ogunquit Beach study completed. The Maine Healthy Beaches Program (MHB) and the Maine Geological Survey (MGS) have completed the current and circulation pattern study for Ogunquit Beach. Because of the chronically high bacteria counts found at Ogunquit Beach during swimming season, we conducted the study to determine zones of contribution and 'hot spots' for pollutants. Our next step is to correlate the study data with bacteria sampling results. We will also meet with the town and local volunteers to discuss what we've found and what we can do to clean up identified pollution sources and better predict unsafe swimming conditions.
CONTACT: Paula Thomson at 287-1482 or paula.thomson@maine.gov

COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Oxford county towns to see new flood maps. The Maine Floodplain Management Program has received preliminary floodplain maps for Oxford County as part of FEMA's new map modernization effort. SPO will hold meetings to review the maps with the affected communities. The meetings will be held in Mexico and Paris on February 19 and 20 respectively. Oxford County is the first county in Maine to have all of its maps digitized into an electronic format that will be available on the Internet through FEMA's new mapping information portal at <https://hazards.Fema.gov/femaportal/wps/portal>. The map modernization program's goal is to convert all its maps to an electronic format and to systematically upgrade them with new topographic, hydraulic, and hydrological data, as funding is made available.

The counties of Kennebec, Cumberland, and York are currently in process and will be completed through the preliminary mapping stage in the next 18 months. Since the beginning of the map modernization program, FEMA has made some adjustments in its strategy and will, in the future, focus on specific census blocks to determine priorities for mapping upgrades rather than whole counties. **CONTACT: Joseph Young at 287-8051 or joseph.young@maine.gov**

LAND FOR MAINE'S FUTURE PROGRAM

LMF farmland conservation in central Waldo County. The Land for Maine's Future Program has purchased an agricultural development rights conservation easement for 217+/- acres in Unity. This conservation easement conserves statewide and locally important farmland soils while allowing the conserved lands to remain available for diversified, commercial agriculture activities and managed forest lands. The combination of upland forest lands and open fields provided by this contiguous landscape enhances wildlife habitat and provides a highly scenic landscape with open views enjoyed by the general public. The property is within proximity of Unity College and several established working farm operations. Through the combined efforts of Friends of Unity Wetlands, USDA's Farmland & Ranchland Protection Program, and the landowners, this farmland conservation project ensures that these productive fields will remain available for agriculture now and into the future.

To date, with the inclusion of this project, the Land for Maine's Future Program has conserved 4,870± acres of Maine farmland. **CONTACT: R. Collin Therrien at 287-5619 or rcollin.therrien@maine.gov or Tim Glidden at 287-1487 or Tim.Glidden@maine.gov**

LAND USE PLANNING PROGRAM

SPO cancels rule hearing. The public hearing on proposed changes to the State Planning Office rule on the Methodology for Identification of Regional Service Centers (Chapter 220) was cancelled on Wednesday due to the weather. Written comments may still be submitted until February 25, 2008 to Donna Bradstreet at State Planning Office 38 State House Station, Augusta, ME 04333. **CONTACT: Stacy Benjamin at 287-8061 or stacy.benjamin@maine.gov**

MAINE COMMISSION FOR COMMUNITY SERVICE

MCCS welcomes intern. Please join us in welcoming Chauncey Bellefleur as an intern at the Maine Commission for Community Service. Chauncey is a junior at Thomas College and her major is communications (marketing and public relations). She is particularly interested in public information and communications in government! Before coming here, Chauncey interned at Madison Paper where she wrote for their company newsletter. She is also on staff for the college newspaper. **CONTACT: Maryalice Crofton at 287-8931 or service.commission@maine.gov**

GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF ENERGY INDEPENDENCE AND SECURITY

Heating fuel prices drop again. The Office of Energy Independence and Security's February 11, 2008, survey of home heating oil prices found the current statewide average cash price for No. 2 heating oil to be down by \$.01 since the last week at \$3.20 per gallon and \$.89 higher than last year at this time. The price of WTI crude oil has climbed to \$91.74 per barrel. This is a major driver of refined product prices, including heating oil. As of February 1, New England (PADD1a) heating oil inventories stood at 9,491 thousand barrels, or 922 thousand barrels less than last year at this time.

The statewide kerosene price average is down by \$0.02 since last week at \$3.61 per gallon and \$.89 higher than last year at this time. Today's propane price survey found the statewide average to be \$2.95 per gallon which is \$0.01 less than last week and \$0.61 higher than last year at this time. The Office conducts a weekly survey of home heating oil, kerosene, and propane prices from November through March. For more information:

<http://www.maineenergyinfo.com/oil/index.html>. **CONTACT: Ian Burnes at 287-8927 or ian.burnes@maine.gov**